European Union and humanitarian aid

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The Committee on Development unanimously adopted an own-initiative report drafted by Thierry **CORNILLET** (ALDE, FR) on a European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid which aims to rationalising the efforts and the distribution of aid between the European Commission and the Member States. The report insists that the Consensus needs to be clearer and more specific in order to enhance European humanitarian policy and also to ensure that the EU's potential as a humanitarian donor is fully exploited.

Moreover, the report deals with the following salient issues:

The EU vision of humanitarian aid

Common objectives: the committee takes theview that the Consensus should contain a detailed definition of **the objectives of EU humanitarian aid**, based on Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/96 concerning humanitarian aid and on the principles and good practice of humanitarian donorship (GHD) endorsed in Stockholm in June 2003. Amongst these objectives particular attention should be paid to the **most vulnerable groups**, such as women, children, the disabled, the elderly and ethnic minorities, including refugees fleeing conflict zones. It stresses that effective humanitarian action, including emergency food aid, should be situation- and needs-based, result-oriented and driven by the principle that saving livelihoods saves lives. For MEPs, humanitarian aid is not a crisis management tool and should be allocated in transparent fashion solely on the basis of real needs and independently of all political considerations. Its main objective is to aim for self-development and self-sufficiency and must not be geared towards making the countries or regions to which the aid is given too dependent on further aid or external assistance.

Common values, principles and good practice: the committee **s**tresses that the EU's humanitarian action should be guided by the humanitarian principles enshrined by the Principles and Good Practice for Humanitarian Donorship (GHD): the principle of humanity; impartiality; neutrality and independence. In addition to which, humanitarian action should be implemented in accordance with two priorities: i) **immediacy**, meaning a stronger emphasis on the elimination of all unreasonable delays in the supply of humanitarian aid and on questioning any delays when appropriate; ii) **effectiveness**.

The report considers that more attention should be paid to the **safety and protection of aid workers**, who regularly have to venture into dangerous areas. It deplores the fact that they are far too frequently the victims of senseless violence, imprisonment or hostage-taking. It roundly condemns any action taken against aid workers. The committee recognises the concept of the **'responsibility to protect'** (UN concept in response to the increase in violations of IHL and human rights and to the powerlessness or unwillingness of governments to protect their own citizens) and believes that the EU should develop initiatives to make the concept a reality, while giving precedence to preventive action, civilian means and support for third-country governments in fulfilling their obligations to protect their populations.

Translating principles into practice: a common EU framework for EU humanitarian aid

- ***EU coordination, coherence and complementarity:***the reportconsiders that the Consensus should enshrine the principles of coordination, policy coherence, complementarity and harmonisation of procedures among the Member States, like the European Consensus on Development. EU coordination mechanisms must reinforce the international coordination efforts of the United Nations, particularly those of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) rather than duplicate them).
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- ***Providing adequate and effective aid:***the parliamentary committee considers thatthe Consensus should include a strong commitment by the EU to adequate provision of humanitarian aid as well as to adequate predictability and flexibility in funding, through adequate annual up-front budgetary provisions. It stresses that the EU should prioritise those humanitarian crises which are under-funded. The committee emphasises that in emergency situations, and especially in the case of emergencies caused by natural disasters, the first 48 hours are crucial in order to save lives. It considers that the EU should strengthen, on the one hand, local prevention, preparedness and response capacity and, on the other hand, improving coordination, early warning mechanisms and adequate pre-positioning of material and stocks at international level. Lastly, it considers that the EU should invest more in understanding and monitoring the vulnerability factors of the population.
- ***Diversity and quality in partnership:***the report welcomes the Commission's proposals to underline the EU's support for a plurality of implementing partners, in particular NGOs, the UN and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, and supports its proposed criteria for partner selection. The report states that the EU should develop strategies to reach out to non-traditional donors whose funding is often earmarked and/or conditional, with the aim of promoting a model of needs-based aid, the principles of IHL and the concept of partnership. It stresses however that **these new sources of funding must not result in a reduction in the funds coming from the EU Member States and the Commission**.
- ***Effectiveness, quality and accountability:***the committee believes thataccountability to disaster-affected communities as primary beneficiaries lies at the heart of any evaluation of humanitarian aid effectiveness, and that the Consensus should duly reflect this principle. It considers in particular that the EU should encourage voluntary accountability initiatives carried out by NGOs. It considers that the EU should promote the use of Inter-Agency Standing Committee guidelines and principles on humanitarian activities, the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, the 1994 Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief and the Humanitarian Charter (SPHERE).
- ***Use of civil protection and military assets and capabilities outside the territory of the EU:***MEPs re affirm that EU civil protection and military assets and capabilities must be deployed in a way which complements and supports the work of humanitarian organisations and limited to those cases or areas where they can provide real added value, and after a thorough prior analysis of the situation. It is considered that the EU should clearly define and ensure respect for the roles and mandates of the civil protection and military actors in humanitarian operations, particularly in conflict situations where impartiality and independence are crucial to guarantee safe access to disaster victims and the efficient delivery of humanitarian aid.
- ***Promoting disaster risk reduction and disaster preparedness:***faced with the growing number and frequency of natural disasters (in particular caused by climate change) and their devastating impact, the committee calls for a time-bound strategy to mainstream DRR (Disaster Risk Reduction) into all EU development and humanitarian aid. The EU is called upon to **allocate at least 10% of additional new funding to humanitarian assistance budgets for reducing disaster risks** and to significantly increase resources for DRR within development aid budgets. The report insists on the need to change in the medium and long term the approach of international humanitarian aid to a marked reinforcement of DRR.
- ***Reinforcing the link to other aid instruments:***the EU is called upon, in collaboration with the international humanitarian actors, to develop guidelines aimed at reinforcing the link between emergency relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD) by basing this approach on the 'do not harm' principles and the 10 'build back better' principles. The report stresses the objective of filling the gap between humanitarian aid and development assistance by making best use of the full range of EU funding instruments. The EU is called upon to prioritise staff training programmes and to clarify the relations between activities supported by the Commission via the stability instrument for crisis prevention, management and resolution (such as disarmament, demobilisation, mine clearing, reintegration of displaced populations/refugees, etc.), and the concomitant activities carried out by DG ECHO.

- ***Implementation of the Consensus on Humanitarian Aid:*** the report calls for the inclusion in the Consensus on Humanitarian Aid of a broad and concrete **road map** for its implementation, including timelines for major projects and initiatives to be undertaken by all EU donors over the next five years. Lastly, the report calls for a regular assessment of the implementation and progress of the Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, involving Parliament fully and on an equal footing with the other institutions in this exercise; calls for the establishment of an appropriate interinstitutional structure and a structured dialogue with Parliament in this area.